

Pleasures of the Mind In Comparison To Pleasures of the Body

Post by “Cassius” of April 13, 2023 at 4:19 PM

We recently had a comment / question asking about this distinction in Epicurean philosophy, and we probably need a subforum or at least a thread with this title. In the context of the question that was asked the question was whether it was proper to distinguish "pleasures of the mind" since everything ultimately originates with the atoms (and asking the question that way implicates the problem with "[reductionist atomism](#)."

When it came up last time I remembered the section from Torquatus which states this point, but not this fragment from Diogenes of Oinoanda:

Fr. 44

[The soul experiences] feelings far greater than the cause which generated them, just as [a fire] vast enough to burn down ports and cities is kindled by an exceedingly small spark. But the pre-eminence of these feelings of [the soul] is difficult for ordinary people to gauge: it is [im]possible to make a direct comparison by experiencing simultaneously the extremes of both (I mean of the feelings of the soul and of the body), since this seldom ever happens and, when it does happen, life is destroyed; and consequently the criterion for determining the pre-eminence of one of the two is not found. Instead, when someone encounters bodily pains, he says that these are greater than those of the soul; and when [he encounters those of the soul, he says that] they [are greater than the others. For] what [is present is] invariably more convincing [than what is absent], and each person is [likely] either through [necessity] or through pleasure, to confer pre-eminence on the feeling which has hold of him. However, this matter, which is difficult for ordinary people to gauge, a wise man calculates on the basis of many factors

[The inscription](#)

Post by “Cassius” of April 13, 2023 at 4:20 PM

The similar point from the [Torquatus section of "On Ends" - \(Rackham\)](#)

XVII. The doctrine thus firmly established has corollaries which I will briefly expound.

(1)The Ends of Goods and Evils themselves, that is, pleasure and pain, are not open to mistake; where people go wrong is in not knowing what things are productive of pleasure and pain.

(2) Again, we aver that mental pleasures and pains arise out of bodily ones (and therefore I allow your contention that any Epicureans who think otherwise put themselves out of court; and I am aware that many do, though not those who can speak with authority); but although men do experience mental pleasure that is agreeable and mental pain that is annoying, yet both of these we assert arise out of and are based upon bodily sensations.

(3) Yet we maintain that this does not preclude mental pleasures and pains from being much more intense than those of the body; since the body can feel only what is present to it at the moment, whereas the mind is also cognizant of the past and of the future. For granting that pain of body is equally painful, yet our sensation of pain can be enormously increased by the belief that some evil of unlimited magnitude and duration threatens to befall us hereafter. And the same consideration may be transferred to pleasure: a pleasure is greater if not accompanied by any apprehension of evil. This therefore clearly appears, that intense mental pleasure or distress contributes more to our happiness or misery than a bodily pleasure or pain of equal duration.

(4) But we do not agree that when pleasure is withdrawn uneasiness at once ensues, unless the pleasure happens to have been replaced by a pain: while on the other hand one is glad to lose a pain even though no active sensation of pleasure comes in its place: a fact that serves to show how great a pleasure is the mere absence of pain.

(5) But just as we are elated by the anticipation of good things, so we are delighted by their recollection. Fools are tormented by the memory of former evils; wise men have the delight of renewing in grateful remembrance the blessings of the past. We have the power both to obliterate our misfortunes in an almost perpetual forgetfulness and to summon up pleasant and agreeable memories of our successes. But when we fix our mental vision closely on the events of the past, then sorrow or gladness ensues according as these were evil or good.

Post by “Don” of April 13, 2023 at 4:53 PM

I've been down this road in a previous thread:

Post

[RE: Confidence in Katastematic Pleasure](#)

I really started down this road in part with the discovery of Metrodorus being quoted in [Clement of Alexandria's Stromata II.131, p. 498](#) which states ([in translation](#))

[...]

The primary source for my contention was simply the title of Metrodorus's book: *On the Source of Happiness in Ourselves being greater than that which arises from Objects*. The Greek title reads: Περι του μειζονα ειναι την παρ' ημας αιτιαν προς ευδαιμονιαν της εκ των...



Don

February 10, 2023 at 11:57 PM

Post by “Don” of April 13, 2023 at 7:21 PM

And along those lines, from my perspective the important distinction isn't mental and physical pleasures; it's pleasures that have their origin within ourselves (recollection, anticipation, freedom from anxiety, etc.) and those that have their origin external to ourselves (taking part in pleasurable activities)